



Helping Communities Become Fire Wise

A successful fire education initiative is adapted to the unique landscape and lifestyles of Alaska

In 1996, near the town of Big Lake, Alaska just north of Anchorage, a wildfire called the Millers Reach Fire destroyed more than 300 structures, including homes. The incident was a somber reminder of the importance of understanding the “inter-

face” between community and wildland, and of taking steps to protect homes and communities from wildfire.

Firewise is a national initiative designed to make homes and communities less vulnerable to damage from wildland fires.

Through books, brochures, video and a website the program teaches homeowners how to recognize and reduce risks. After the Millers Reach fire, members of the Alaska Wildland Fire Coordinating Group (AWFCG), an organization that includes state and federal agencies and native corporations, thought

it would be a good idea to make more use of the National Firewise program in Alaska. But they soon realized that the few Firewise materials available at the time were really not suited to the unique Alaska wildlands. So, this project came to be – an effort by the Forest Service, working with the AWFCG, to produce Firewise educational materials designed specifically for Alaskan communities and native villages. It is called the Firewise Community Action Program for Alaska

New Materials Designed Specifically for Alaska

The result is a series of brochures aimed at individual homeowners, and a “train-the-trainer” package that is being presented to community and village representatives with the idea that they would then become the source of information in their area. The project has also been tied to the larger Project Impact program, a FEMA funded effort to help communities prepare for other natural disasters.

Through the Firewise program in Alaska residents learn how to site their home to make it less vulnerable to wildfire, how to create a “defensible” space around their home, what materials to use in new construction or remodeling to lower the risk of wildfire damage, and other tips to help protect their homes, such as shutters, mesh chimney caps or keeping gutters



clean. There are also evaluation forms to help determine a fire risk rating for homes and checklists for planning and preparing for wild-fire. Training and take-home materials focus on six learning elements:

- ♦ Landscaping
- ♦ Making sure emergency personnel can locate and get to your home
- ♦ Emergency water supply
- ♦ Building or remodeling to make your home fire resistant
- ♦ Fire safety inside the home
- ♦ Planning for a wildland fire emergency

With this part of the project complete, there are now plans to produce Firewise information onto CD-ROMs to allow more use and easier distribution.

Funding for the Firewise Community Action Program for Alaska was provided by the members of the AWFCG.

Partners in this Project

- ♦ Forest Service, Alaska Region, State and Private Forestry
- ♦ Bureau of Land Management
- ♦ U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
- ♦ National Park Service
- ♦ Bureau of Indian Affairs
- ♦ State of Alaska (DOF, DEC, Fish & Game)
- ♦ Mat-Su Borough
- ♦ Chitina Village Council
- ♦ State Fire Chiefs

To Find Out More

Wayne Bushnell
Forest Service, Alaska Region
State and Private Forestry
907-743-9459

